

Case File Management Standards

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Introduction

Purpose

The court, under the direction of the chief judge, has responsibility for the maintenance of all records necessary to adequately support the business of the court which is accomplished through the assistance of various staff support, including but not limited to, court administrators, registers of probate, clerks of the court, and friends of the court. These standards identify both the basic elements for managing case file records within the trial courts and the basic roles that various staff have with regard to that management. Although there are many other records within the trial courts which would benefit from records management, the role of these particular standards is to provide the trial courts with minimum criteria and procedures for achieving systematic control over all of the recorded information relating to case files, from case initiation to permanent retention or destruction of the records.

Records Management in General

The case file management standards are a first step toward establishing a framework by which the trial courts may implement a records management program. A records management program has responsibility for controlling records throughout the court for the life cycle of those records. A records management program generally includes the creation, distribution, use, retention, storage, retrieval, protection, preservation, and final disposition of each type of record. The primary functions of records management are records retention and scheduling, inactive records storage, records security, document storage and retrieval, and micrographics systems.

At each stage of activity in the life cycle of a record, someone must be responsible for controlling the record. In order to maintain this type of control, the records management program is also responsible for establishing standards, policies, and procedures which will produce effective control. The type of control a trial court uses depends on the organization of the court and the practical needs of those who use the records. Courts may choose a centralized file system, a decentralized file system, or a decentralized file system with centralized control. There are benefits and advantages to each type of file system, so the decision should be made only after conducting a records inventory and procedural analysis

Development, Layout and Design of Standards

The case file management standards are the result of the recommendations and hard work of the Michigan Trial Court Case File Management Standards Committee. The case file management standards focus on five primary areas of records management: 1) active case file management; 2) filing systems and storage; 3) forms and reports management; 4) file retention and destruction; and 5) records media. The area of active case file management is grouped by the three major phases of case management: 1) case initiation and maintenance; 2) case disposition to closing; and 3) post-adjudication. Each of the standards is identified as a separate component and provides, at a minimum, the technical criteria for the component. Each component may also contain procedures, authoritative citations, and cross references to other components or sources of relevant information. Other materials are provided in the Appendix.